

STAT

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
11 January 1984

WASHINGTON
VATICAN - CIA

The executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee today expressed his concern that full relationships between the Vatican and the United States could endanger American missionaries and jeopardize their activities.

Tuesday, the Vatican and the State Department announced restoration of full diplomatic relations for the first time in 116 years. The White House said President Reagan will nominate William Wilson, 69, a Catholic convert and longtime friend of Reagan now serving as his personal representative to the Vatican, as the new envoy to the Holy See.

James Dunn, head of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said on the CBS "Morning News" program that diplomatic ties with the Vatican is a "clear violation of church-state separation."

"We see it having dangerous precedent of the government meddling in religious affairs and we see some practical problems with intent to use the information gathering and intelligence networks of the Roman Catholic Church around the world," Dunn said.

"We've had troubles with the CIA meddling with missionaries and impersonating missionaries and it's inconceivable to me to think that this move ... will not seriously jeopardize and put at risk some of our people, especially Roman Catholic missionaries."

Dunn said that for two decades there have been "attempts by our CIA to use missionaries and impersonate missionaries."

Dunn said The Americans United for Separation of Church and State will fight the decision in court.

"Before then, we'll be opposed to it as the appropriations committees in the House and Senate look at reprogramming the State Department budget," Dunn said. "We'll be opposed to the confirmation of the ambassador to the Vatican and then, if it gets to be a fact of life, we'll oppose it in court."